

The EU knowledge system for lifelong learning

Planning is underway for the development of the EU knowledge system for lifelong learning. The purpose of the knowledge system is to make accessible information on national policy initiatives that are contributing to the development of strategies for lifelong learning in the Member States. The knowledge system will also serve as the EU showcase of national efforts that are contributing to the evolution of the European area of lifelong learning.

The EU as a world quality reference for lifelong learning

Member States are working towards the attainment of common objectives to ensure the full development of EU citizens through lifelong learning. Their aim is to make a vital contribution to the EU goal of becoming the world's most dynamic knowledge based society and economy.

To achieve these objectives in the shortest possible time Member States must learn from and support

each other as their strategies for lifelong learning evolve. Sharing good examples of practice speeds up the introduction of innovation and reform. This exchange also helps to make the national strategies transparent and as coherent and compatible as possible.

The Commission facilitates dialogue and co-operation in a number of ways and the knowledge system is the latest response to the urgent need to strengthen the cross-fertilisation process.

Dialogue and co-operation to promote lifelong learning

The EU policy framework for developments in the field of lifelong learning is known as **Education and Training 2010** (http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/III_en.html). This provides the context for **policy makers** in the field of lifelong learning, those who work closely with and for them and intermediaries operating at the interface of policy and practice to exchange information on new policy initiatives review them and learn from each other. The knowledge system for lifelong learning will support the work of these key actors and help to make this body of knowledge available to a wider audience.

Policy initiatives that aim to develop lifelong learning

Good examples of policy initiatives that form part of the Member States' strategies for the development of

lifelong learning are at the core of the proposed knowledge system. Policy initiatives can be defined as the measures adopted to make policy decisions work. They are characterised by a coherent set of goals, priorities and strategies covering an extended duration and implying a steady and constant allocation of resources. National policy initiatives are increasingly responsive to mutually agreed EU priority actions, "building blocks" and success indicators, which provide a useful degree of uniformity that is conducive to data collection.

The knowledge system

The web-based knowledge system will be developed through a process of active co-operation between the Commission, its agencies and the Member States. It will contain high quality information on national lifelong learning policy initiatives. The Member States will provide data on good examples of policy initiatives in a common format and according to mutually agreed criteria.

The descriptions of the initiatives will be comprehensive and concise. The information will be classified and stored to facilitate ease of access and comparative analysis. This, in turn, will aid the processes of benchmarking, cross-fertilisation and even adaptation and transfer, as appropriate.

The knowledge system will make best use of state-of-the-art information and communication technologies and expertise in knowledge management. The data on the policy initiatives will be linked to

lifelong learning



complementary information sources that will help to place them in context, at both national and EU levels. Support facilities will be integrated to facilitate communication between virtual communities of practice.

Challenges

National strategies for lifelong learning "from the cradle to the grave" are slow to evolve. Moreover, each EU country has embarked on this journey from a different starting point and makes progress at a speed that suits its unique circumstances. The knowledge system must accommodate the diversity of approaches adopted in the diverse contexts of the Member States.

The knowledge system will need to be responsive to the priorities identified at EU level for Education and Training 2010 and for lifelong learning in related contexts, such as the European Social Fund and the European Employment Strategy. Accordingly, it must be integrated into the overall EU strategy for the development of lifelong learning and be of support to key actors, including experts appointed to EU-level working groups. Ideally, the knowledge system will be an integral part of the new integrated Action Programme in the field of lifelong learning (2007-2013).

The knowledge system must make best use of resources by ensuring that existing expertise and experience is tapped, synergy between different networks and initiatives is facilitated and due

account is taken of available information and previous related activities. This requires engaging all stakeholders from the outset in the strategic planning for the knowledge system, providing expert co-ordination and support, facilitating the full participation of Member States as partners in its design, management and long-term maintenance and ensuring that the ICT environment is responsive to needs.

The status quo

The EU management structure, envisaged for the development of the knowledge system, reflects its scope and involves all relevant directorates of EU Commission's DG Education and Culture and other DGs, as appropriate. Relevant EU and, where willing, international level agencies and organisations will be invited to take part.

Cedefop, at the request of the Commission, has a team working on the development of the concept for the knowledge system, which includes management, contents and technical experts. Cedefop draws on its expertise related to: the design and management of a Portal (<http://www.trainingvillage.gr/>), a knowledge system (KMS), a database (eKnowVET) and virtual platforms to support communities of practice in the field of vocational education and training (<http://communities.trainingvillage.gr/>). It will also contribute its expertise in policy analysis and comparative research in VET and research in the overarching field of lifelong learning. Furthermore, Cedefop can build on its experience of managing

ReferNet, the network of national interlocutors for VET.

Cedefop was requested to develop a proposal for the development of the knowledge system. This proposal, which was approved by the Commission, defined underlying concepts, principles and criteria, recommended a development strategy and a co-operation process and outlined the possibilities with regard to the architecture and contents of the knowledge system.

The Commission presented the plan to the Member States at the November 2004 meeting of the national co-ordinators for lifelong learning and requested their co-operation. A Steering Group comprising representation from the Member States, the Commission and Cedefop will soon be established with the remit to finalise the strategic plan for the knowledge system and put the plan into operation in 2005.

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